

Wisconsin Parental Choice Program Frequently Asked Questions – 2014-15 School Year

1. How does someone qualify for the program?

A student qualifies for the Choice program on the basis of their residency and their family income, if applicable. Students must reside in a Wisconsin school district, other than Milwaukee and Racine Unified School Districts. For the 2014-15 school year, a new student must have a family income at or below the amount listed in the table below. Students who participated in the WPCP in 2013-14 or were on the DPI's waiting list in 2013-14 are not required to prove that they are income eligible. Family income includes the income of the child's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) that reside in the same household as the student applicant. If the child's parents/legal guardians are married their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income eligibility for the program. Family size includes parents/guardians and their children by birth, marriage or adoption that reside in the same household as the student applicant.

Table 1
185% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2014-15

<u>Family Size</u>	<u>Maximum Yearly Income</u>
1	\$21,554
2	\$29,095
3	\$36,636
4	\$44,177
5	\$51,718
6	\$59,259

For each additional member add \$7,541.

2. What are the student participation limits for the program?

For the 2014-15 school year, the program is limited to 1,000 FTE (full-time equivalent) pupils statewide. In addition, no more than 1% of the pupil membership of a school district may attend a participating private school. The 25 schools that participated in the WPCP in 2013-14 will be allocated the same number of pupil slots for the 2014-15 school year. If more than 1,000 students apply to participate in the program, only the 25 schools with the most applicants are eligible for the remaining 500 seats. Each of the 25 schools will be allocated 10 seats for choice students by random selection with preference given to siblings. The remaining 250 seats will be filled randomly, with sibling preference, with applicants to the 25 schools.

3. How does a student apply for the program?

The first, and possibly only, application period for the 2014-15 school year is from **February 1 – April 21st, 2014. Late applications will not be accepted for any reason.** If more than 1,000 students apply during this application period, there will be no additional open application periods. Parents must complete the on-line student application available through the following webpage: <http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/wpcp-statewide>. Parents must provide residency documentation and income documentation, if applicable to the school(s) they apply to during the application period or the application is ineligible. Parents/guardians may either: (a) provide their social security numbers or taxpayer identification number to the school and have the Department of Revenue determine whether the student is income eligible for the program; or (b) use the Department of Public Instruction's income determination method by answering a series of income questions in the on-line application and providing paper income documentation to the school(s) as directed in the application during the open application period. The school will verify that the student meets the income requirements. Applicants must also provide proof of

residency directly to the schools during the open application period. A student can apply to the Choice program at one or more schools during the open application periods.

4. What information can the private schools use in admitting or denying admission to students into the Choice program?

The only information private schools can use to determine eligibility for the Choice program is family income, residency and age for kindergarten and first grade. Information about an applicant that a school may not use during the admissions process for the Choice program includes but is not limited to an applicant's race, ethnic background, religion, prior test scores, grades, recommendations or membership in the church parish.

5. What fees and tuition are the schools allowed to charge Choice students?

Fees: A student in the Choice program can be charged reasonable fees for personal items such as towels, gym clothes or uniforms, social and extracurricular activities if the activity is not a part of the required curriculum, musical instruments, meals, and high school classes not required or credited for graduation. A Choice student cannot be charged fees for registration or application to the Choice program, books, teacher salaries, buildings, maintenance, equipment, computers, or transportation if required to be provided or reimbursed by the school district. Schools participating in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program may not charge Choice students tuition.

Tuition: A private school may not charge or receive any additional tuition payments for a Choice student in grades kindergarten through 8. However, a private school may, in addition to the state aid payment it receives, charge a Choice student tuition in an amount determined by the school if both of the following apply: (a) the student is in grades 9 through 12; and (b) the family income of the student exceeds 220% of the federal poverty level as listed below. If the student's parents/legal guardians are married their income is reduced by \$7,000 when determining income for tuition purposes. The private school makes the determination whether the school can charge tuition to a student in grades 9 through 12. The private school must establish a process for accepting appeals to the governing body related to the school's determination to charge a student tuition based on the student's family income. Students who participated in the program in the previous semester or were on the DPI waiting list in the 2013-14 school year are not required to show income eligibility so their income may be above 220% of the federal poverty level.

Table 2
220% of the Federal Poverty Level for 2014-15

<u>Family Size</u>	<u>Maximum Yearly Income</u>
1	\$25,632
2	\$34,599
3	\$43,566
4	\$52,533
5	\$61,500
6	\$70,467

For each additional member add \$8,967.

6. Can a school require parents to raise funds or volunteer time?

A school may ask a parent to raise funds for or contribute volunteer time to the school, but cannot require it as a condition of admission or impose any penalties on a parent or child in the Choice program for failure to participate in fundraising activities or volunteer time.

7. How does the parent and private school receive state aid payments?

The state will issue payments payable to the choice school where the child is enrolled in the Choice program. The first two payments (in September and November) are sent to the school where the child is enrolled and attended on the 3rd Friday in September. The second two payments (in February and May) are sent to the school where the child is enrolled and attended on the 2nd Friday in January.

8. How much is the state aid per student in the Choice program and what can the school spend that state aid on?

In the 2014-2015 school year, the estimated state aid amount for a student enrolled full-time in the Choice program at a particular school (defined as enrolled in the Choice program and in attendance on both the 3rd Friday in September and the 2nd Friday in January) is \$7,210 for pupils in grades K-8 and \$7,856 for pupils in grades 9-12 or the private school's operating and debt service cost per student, whichever is less. The private school is required to hire an independent certified public accountant to audit the operating and debt service cost per student at the school. (For example, if a school with grades K-8 is spending \$3,000 per student, after adjustments the school will in the end receive \$3,000 per Choice student. If a school spends \$8,000 per student, the school will receive \$7,210 per student since the school's actual per pupil cost is above the maximum amount paid for students in K-8.) The private school may spend the state aid for any educational purpose.

9. Is transportation available for students in the Choice program?

A private Choice school is not required to provide transportation to Choice students. If a private school notifies the school district of the school's attendance area and the names and addresses of its students for the following school year, in some cases the school district will provide transportation or reimburse parents' transportation costs in part. If the school district is not required to provide transportation for the Choice pupil, and the Choice school chooses to provide transportation, the Choice school may charge the parent or guardian a fee for the service. Parents should check with the Choice school where their child hopes to attend and with the school district to determine what transportation options are available at the school, if any.

10. Is a child in the Choice program at a private religious school required to participate in religious activities or instruction?

No. If a Choice student's parent or guardian submits to the student's teacher or the school's principal a written request that the student be excused from any religious activity, the teacher and school must honor that request.

11. Is a private Choice school required to enroll a child with special needs in the Choice program, and to provide the child with whatever services are required to allow the child to learn?

A private school may not discriminate against a child with special educational needs during the admissions process for the Choice program. However, as a private school, a Choice school is required to offer only those services to assist students with special needs that it can provide with minor adjustments. Parents should contact the Choice school during the admission process about the services the school is able to provide for their child. Parents should also contact the school district in which the private school is located for more information on the services the school district provides to children with special needs who are enrolled in the public schools and the lesser services that the school district provides children with special needs who are enrolled in private schools.

12. Are there statutory procedures regarding student suspensions and expulsions that a private Choice school is required to follow?

Yes. State law requires private Choice schools to have written procedures in place regarding student suspensions and expulsions, including procedures for appealing a suspension or expulsion. Parents should check with the Choice school they are considering for their child regarding procedures the school has in place.

Wisconsin public schools must have suspension and expulsion procedures in place under Wisconsin Statute sec. 120.13(1). That state law describes actions punishable by suspension or expulsion and allows a pupil or the parent or guardian to appeal a suspension to the school administrator. In addition, public school expulsions are determined by the school board and may be appealed to the State Superintendent and Circuit Court. There is no state law prohibiting a public school from enrolling a child who has been expelled from a private Choice school.

13. Can a school withhold grades, pupil records, or a high school diploma for any reason?

No, a Choice school may not withhold grades or pupil records from a student for any reason, including failure to pay any required fees or tuition. A Choice school must issue a high school diploma or certificate to each Choice student who attends the school and satisfactorily completes the course of instruction and any other requirements necessary for high school graduation. A Choice school is also required to provide a copy of a choice pupil's records upon request from the pupil's parent or guardian.

14. What are the requirements a private Choice school must follow regarding transfer of Choice pupil records to the parent or guardian or to another private or public school?

Choice schools are required to send pupil records to another school district or school (including private Choice schools) within 5 working days of receiving written notice from the pupil or the parent of a minor student that the student intends to enroll in the other school.

Upon request, a Choice school must provide a student or the parent of a minor student who is attending the school with a copy of the student's progress records. Progress records mean those student records which include the student's grades, a statement of the courses the student has taken, the student's attendance record, the student's immunization records, any lead screening records required under state law and records of the student's school extracurricular activities.

A Choice school must maintain progress records for each Choice student while the student attends the school and, unless the school ceases operation, for at least five years after the student ceases to attend the school. A Choice school that ceases operating must either; (1) transfer all progress records for Choice students to the school district in which the private school is located and send written notice to each student or the parent or guardian of a minor student that the records have been transferred, or (2) transfer the Choice student's records to an affiliated organization that will maintain the progress records for at least five years if the student or the parent of a minor student consents in writing to the release of the progress records to the affiliated organization.

15. Is there an opportunity for parents to meet with the school's governing board?

Yes. The school is required to have at least two meetings a year for the parents to meet with the governing board. The school must notify parents at least 30 days prior to the meeting.

If you have any questions that are not included here, please call, write or e-mail them to Molly Koranda or Latoya Holiday, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841, toll free 1-888-245-2732 ext. 3, or PrivateSchoolChoice@dpi.wi.gov.